

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-12

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FM AMCONSUL LAHORE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9636

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AMCONSUL KARACHI

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TAGS: PINT, PK

SUBJECT: ASGHAR KHAN MAKES SOME GAINS

REF: LAHORE 0743

BEGIN SUMMARY: TEHREEK PARTY CHIEF ASGHAR KHAN HAS SETTLED IN LAHORE WHERE JUNE BROUGHT HIM SEVERAL CONVERTS OF SOME STATURE INCLUDING FORMER LAW MINISTER KASURI. ASGHAR CONTINUED ATTACKS ON AND DEFIANCE OF BHUTTO REGIME. DESPITE HIS POLITICAL FAILINGS, HE SHOULD NOT BE DISMISSED AS POLITICALLY IREELEVANT. END SUMMARY.

1. MONTH OF JUNE HAS WITNESSED SOME MODEST ENHANCEMENT IN PUNJAB POLITICAL STRENGTH OF RETIRED AIR MRSHAL ASGHAR KHAN, CHIEF OF TEHREEK- I- ISTIQLAL- I- PAKISTAN (TEHREEK) PARTY, WHO HAS ANNOUNCED SHIFT OF HIS PERMANENT ADDRESS TO LAHORE.

2. MIAN MAHMUD KASURI, MNA AND FORMER CENTRAL LAW MINISTER OUSTED BY PPP, ANNOUNCED JUNE 8 THAT HE WAS JOINING TEHREEK. ON JUNE 10 HE WAS FOLLOWED BY ANOTHER (FORMER PPP) MNA, AHMAD RAZA KASURI. WITHIN THE WEEK

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FOLLOWING, NEWS REPORTS NOTED FURTHER TEHREEK CONVERTS :
A FORMER PUNJAB UNIVERSITY STUDENT UNION PRESIDENT; MISS QARI, LADY BAR- AT- LAW AND PRESENT PRESIDENT OF LAHORE HIGH COURT BAR ASSCN; M. ANWAR, LAHORE' S LEADING GADFLY LAWYER; AND, IN ADDITION, YOUTH GROUPS CALLED MUSLIM STUDENTS' FEDERATION AND PAKISTAN YOUTH FORCE, AND SCATTERING OF LAWYERS IN LAHORE.

3. PARTY WAS BUSY DURING MONTH WITH FREQUENT PRESS CONFERENCES AND GATHERINGS IN LAHORE IN WHICH FORMER AIR MARSHALL EXUDED OPTIMISM ABOUT TEHREEK' S FUTURE AND CONTINUED HIS ROUNDHOUSE DENOUNCEMENTS OF BHUTTO AND PPP. HE OPPOSED BANGLADESH RECOGNITION (REFTEL) ON GROUNDS IT WOULD CLOSE DOOR TO REUNIFICATION; DEMANDED BHUTTO BE BROUGHT TO ACCOUNT FOR HIS ROLE IN LOSS OF EAST WING; CHARGED RULING PARTY WITH PUSHING BALUCHISTAN AND NWFP TOWARD PROVINCIALISM; ATTACKED GOVT' S REPRESSION OF POLITICAL OPPONENTS; AND PROMISED AGITATION ON PROBLEM OF HIGH PRICES. HE RAISED EYEBROWS AT ONE POINT, INCLUDING SOME OF HIS OWN PARTY, BY DESCRIBING SHEIKH MUJIB ASHAVING BEEN PATRIOT WHO BELIEVED IN INTEGRITY OF PAKISTAN AND WANTED NOTHING MORE THAN TO BE PRIME MINISTER OF ENTIRE COUNTRY.

4. ASGHAR KHAN ALSO PERFORMED DURING MONTH WHAT HE DOES BEST: DEFIANT PUBLIC APPEARANCE WHICH AMOUNTED TO THUMBING NOSE AT PPP. AFTER REPEATED PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENTS, HE APPEARED ON JUNE 18 FOR AFTERNOON PRAYERS AT MARTYR S' MOSQUE ON CENTRAL POINT OF LAHORE' S MAIN STREET, THE MALL, TOGETHER WITH BAND OF FOLLOWERS. MOSQUE IS SITUATED HUNDRED YARDS FROM PPP CITY HQ ON ONE SIDE AND EQUI- DISTANT FROM PPP DISTRICT HQ ON OTHER SIDE. POLICE SATURATED AREA AND TENSE SITUATION, WHICH INCLUDED PRESENCE OF HUNDREDS OF PPP TOUGHS, PASSED WITHOUT INCIDENT.

5. COMMENT: MANY OF OUR PAKISTANI CONTACTS HAVE MIXED FEELINGS ABOUT ASGHAR, DISMISSING HIM POLITICALLY AS A NON- STARTER, BUT COMPELLED TO ADMIRE HIS GUTS. IT SEEMS TO US THAT HE IS RATHER PAINFULLY ATTEMPTING IN HIS CAMPAIGN TO EMULATE BHUTTO' S EARLY EFFORTS TO WELD THE PPP TOGETHER AS A WEAPON FOR BLUDGEONING THE REGIME. HOWEVER, LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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HIS TEHREEK SIMPLY DOES NOT HAVE THE RAW MATERIAL ON WHICH TO BUILD A CASE AS BHUTTO ONCE DID; SITUATION IS NOT THE SAME; AND ASGHAR IS NOT RPT NOT BHUTTO. NEVER- THELESS, IT WOULD BE MISTAKE TO DISMISS HIM TOO LIGHTLY. IF HE CONTINUES TO ROPE IN PEOPLE LIKE THE KASURIS, HE MIGHT RECEIVE BETTER POLITICAL GUIDANCE THAN FROM THE SECOND- RATERS HE HAS SO FAR ATTRACTED. FURTHERMORE, THE

OLD QUESTION ALWAYS REMAINS: IF SOMETHING HAPPENS TO BHUTTO,
WHAT THEN? ASGHAR KHAN AND HIS TEHREEK NEED TO BE CAREFULLY
WATCHED AS ONE OF THE POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES.
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